

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Building

and or common Memorial Hall

2. Location

street & number 600 North 7th Street

N/A not for publication

city, town Kansas City

N/A vicinity of

state Kansas

code 20

county

Wyandotte

code 209

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture <input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial <input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational <input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment <input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government <input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial <input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: war memorial & public hall

4. Owner of Property

name City of Kansas City, KS, c/o City Administrator

street & number Municipal Office Building, 701 North 7th Street

city, town Kansas City

N/A vicinity of

state Kansas 66101

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. County Clerk

street & number Wyandotte County Courthouse, 700 North 7th Street

city, town Kansas City

state Kansas 66101

6. Representation in Existing Surveys (See continuation sheet also)

title Kansas City, KS Historic Landmark has this property been determined eligible? ☐ yes ☒ no

date August 2, 1983 ☐ federal ☐ state ☐ county ☒ local

depository for survey records City Planning Division, City of Kansas City, KS

city, town Kansas City

state KS 66101

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Title: Kansas Historic Resources Inventory

Date: June 1, 1973      \_\_\_ federal     X  state    \_\_\_ county    \_\_\_ local

Depository for survey records: Historic Preservation Department  
Kansas State Historical Society  
120 W. 10th

City,town: Topeka

State: Kansas 66612

## 7. Description

### Condition

☒ excellent

☐ good

☐ fair

☐ deteriorated

☐ ruins

☐ unexposed

### Check one

☐ unaltered

☒ altered

### Check one

☒ original site

☐ moved

date

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Building is a masonry building measuring 213 by 168 feet, with a single entrance portico projecting to the east and a corresponding projection of the stage loft on the west. The side walls linking the stage projection to the main north and south facades are angled due to the interior auditorium layout. The structure is reinforced concrete tile block, faced on the exterior with a warm brown brick trimmed with limestone and cream-colored terra cotta. The building contains three stories and a basement, with a raised attic running the length of the middle third of the building from the attic screen of the front portico to the higher stage loft at the rear. The portico is classical in design, but the remainder of the exterior is more nearly Georgian in its restraint, a feeling emphasized by the predominance of eight-over-eight double-hung windows.

The entry portico consists of six stone Tuscan columns, three stories in height, set in antis between flanking blocks containing fire stairs. The entablature above the columns is plain, in keeping with the Tuscan order, with a frieze unornamented save for incised letters giving the name of the building and paired swags in relief at the ends. The cornice is very pronounced, with details borrowed from the Doric order. Above the entablature is a high parapet or attic screen. The base and cap of the parapet are of stone and the wall is brick with terra cotta panels including inscriptions and two flanking eagles in high relief.

Behind the columns of the portico, five double doors topped with elaborate stone cartouches containing small bullseye windows open into the Memorial Hall. This two-story space measuring 45 by 73 feet functions both as a memorial and as the building's lobby. On the west side of the Memorial Hall is a second set of five double doors, leading into the foyer of the auditorium. Above these doors on the second floor is an arcaded gallery looking out over the Hall, the five arches matching those enfaming the entry opposite, while three corresponding arches grace the north and south walls.

Appropriate to its purpose, Memorial Hall is the most elaborately detailed space in the building. A wainscot of Carthage marble runs around the perimeter of the room, supporting twelve engaged Corinthian columns and four corresponding corner piers executed in plaster, the columns and piers separating the sixteen arches. Other decorative plaster work includes multiple mouldings, large bas reliefs of laurel and olive branches surmounting the arches, and decorated ceiling beams. Under each of the arches is an inscription of a patriotic or memorial quotation. Two large bronze chandeliers hang from the ceiling. The ceiling lights in the gallery are handsome milk glass globes with incised or painted classical decoration. Similar globes are placed within the Memorial Hall chandeliers. In the central arches of the north and south walls are two large bronze plaques enframed with Carthage marble, giving the names of the honored dead. Originally, ticket windows were set into the easternmost arches between the memorial plaques and the outside doors. These openings were subsequently filled in to allow the placement of plaques giving the names of the World War II dead.

Balancing the ticket window locations in the arches to the west of the memorial plaques are doors giving access to smaller halls to the north and south of the Memorial Hall. These rooms were intended for the use of veterans' organizations and their auxiliaries. Each meeting room contains a large brick fireplace on its west wall. The doors and trim work, like those elsewhere throughout the building, are stained oak. A Room of Silence

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opens off the south hall, containing pictures of the Wyandotte County war dead. Similar spaces intended for offices and meeting rooms and also containing fireplaces, were placed on the second and third floors above. Unlike the majority of the windows in the building, those of the ground floor meeting rooms are paired casements of ten lights each.

The space above Memorial Hall on the third floor was intended for use as a chapel, with a seating capacity of 600. A dark oak wainscot with burlled panels surrounds the room and blends with beautifully detailed oak window and door enframements. The panels of the entry doors on the north and south contain stained glass set in wood mullions. Similar stained glass is set in the five large casement windows in the east wall, which open out onto the upper level of the portico in line with the entry doors below. The walls above the wainscot are of ornamental plaster work and are divided into panels separated by paired Corinthian pilasters. The ceiling is similarly divided with plaster beams, the inset panels variously containing six small bronze chandeliers, four vents in the form of large ornamental cartouches, and five skylights of stained and leaded glass. These sky lights receive natural light from five similarly placed skylights set into the attic roof some ten feet above.

The five doors on the west side of Memorial Hall on the first floor give access to the main circulation space, which doubles as the foyer of the civic auditorium. At the north and south ends of this space are ramps which gave the building its unique circulation system. This circulation space effectively divides the building into two parts, the memorial and office spaces on the east and the civic auditorium on the west. The insertion of ticket offices into this central circulation space has divided the ramp areas from the auditorium, although they were originally open to each other.

The auditorium consists of an arena floor, a balcony and a gallery. Its original seating capacity was 3,532. The ceiling of the auditorium originally extended up into the attic area, but a suspended ceiling with false plaster beams was added later, perhaps in the 1940s. A new stage proscenium was executed at the same time as the dropped ceiling, with curved walls and horizontal bands in the Art Moderne mode popular in the 30s and early 40s. The basement below was equipped with a kitchen, restrooms, and other facilities. At the west or stage end of the auditorium there were originally large doors on the north and south walls which would allow a motorized parade to pass through the building across the stage. The north door was subsequently walled up with brick but has recently been proposed for reopening. The civic auditorium was intended to be leased for public gatherings to provide revenue for the upkeep of the entire Memorial Building.

Aside from the alterations to the auditorium and the insertion of ticket booths into the auditorium foyer, changes to the building have been minimal. For a time after the City took direct control of the building, the chapel was divided with temporary partitions for City offices; these have fortunately been removed with little damage.

In 1973, the Memorial Hall was repainted in lighter colors than the original which were nevertheless quite sensitive to the architectural character of the space. Unfortunately both the stone entablature and the terra cotta panels of the parapet on the exterior have also been painted. It is now intended that the exterior paint be removed if a way can be found to do it without harming the original finish.

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The only other changes to the exterior have been replacement of some windows in the auditorium with new metal windows not really in keeping with the overall design, and the installation of a concrete wheel chair ramp at the north end of the portico, which unfortunately partially obscures the 1924 cornerstone date at the base of one of the six columns. The visual impact of these alterations is very slight given the size and general integrity of the structure.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
prehistoric	..... archeology-prehistoric	..... community planning	..... landscape architecture	..... religion
1400-1499	..... archeology-historic	..... conservation	..... law	..... science
1500-1599	..... agriculture	..... economics	..... literature	..... sculpture
1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	..... education	..... military	..... social/
1700-1799	..... art	..... engineering	..... music	..... humanitarian
1800-1899	..... commerce	..... exploration/settlement	..... philosophy	..... theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	..... communications	..... industry	..... politics/government	..... transportation
		..... invention		..... other (specify)

**Specific dates** 1923-25 **Builder/Architect** Rose & Peterson of Kansas City, KS

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Building is a distinctive example of the combination of war memorial and civic auditorium that was erected in many cities in the years following World War I. Its design and workmanship is an example of the accomplished classicism and beautifully executed craftsmanship often found in the architecture of the 1920s. It was one of the finest achievements of Rose and Peterson, an architectural firm whose work dominated and shaped the development of Kansas City, KS from 1900 to 1930. In addition, the building served for a brief period as the national headquarters of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Nearly 6,500 men from Wyandotte County served in World War I, and fourteen were decorated for gallantry in action. With the end of the war, many communities around the country began considering the erection of memorials to those who had served. The Kansas Legislature in 1921 passed an authorization for municipalities to expend public funds for such a purpose. The legislation called for a local election on the question upon petition of twenty-five percent of the registered voters.

Veterans led by Harry Darby circulated a petition in Kansas City, KS, and soon had the requisite number of signatures. The petition called for the Board of City Commissioners to authorize up to \$500,000 for the purchase of a site and the erection of a memorial building. The election was held on July 12, 1921, and the proposal was approved by a vote of 2,162 to 1,391.

The site selected for the memorial was on the west side of 7th Street between Barnett and Tauromee Avenues. The site was occupied and it became necessary to acquire it through condemnation, resulting in a substantial delay. The final site costs came to \$96,046.01.

While site acquisition was proceeding, a new factor was introduced into the proposal. The Veterans of Foreign Wars held its national meeting at Seattle, WA, in August, 1922. Delegates from Kansas City, KS carried an invitation from the City Commissioners for the V.F.W. to establish its national headquarters in Kansas City. Space was promised in the new Memorial Building upon its completion. There was apparently some question as to the validity of the offer, and no action was taken by the V.F.W. at that time.

On January 3, 1923, Mayor Burton appointed three trustees to have charge of the new building as provided for in the statute. These trustees were Dr. J.L. Otterman (G.A.R.), Frank Strickland (V.F.W.), and Harry Darby (American Legion). Three days after the appointments, the Board of City Commissioners renewed its offer to the V.F.W. at a special meeting. It was hoped that this could be worked out without any legal difficulties, a hope that eventually proved to be futile.

The local architectural firm of Rose and Peterson had been selected to prepare plans for the Memorial Building. These plans were apparently not complete when a ground breaking ceremony was held on May 14, 1923. The Wyandotte Post of the American Legion was in charge of the ceremony. Governor Jonathan M. Davis and Commander in Chief Ousley of the

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American Legion were the principal guests. The parade from the City Hall to the memorial site was a colorful procession led by the colors, under which marched the Wyandotte Legion post, drum and bugle corps and band, two companies of the Kansas National Guard, and motor cars which contained a group of Canadian War Veterans. The program at the site consisted of an invocation by Rev. Phillip W. Crandall, an address of welcome by Mayor W.W. Gordon, addresses by Governor Davis and Commander Ousley, and a closing prayer by Rabbi Simon Glazer. Commander Ousley broke the ground with a silver spade, assisted by decorated veterans of three wars: Captain W.H. Ward of the Civil War, Wm. B. Trembley of the Spanish American War (Medal of Honor, Philippines Campaign), and Frank Stillwell of the World War.

Rose and Peterson's architectural plans were finally approved two months later, on July 19. The principal contract was let on August 16 to the Baer Engineering Company of Leavenworth, KS.

As construction began, the Veterans of Foreign Wars were meeting in Norfolk, VA. At this meeting, on August 27, 1923, the organization formally accepted the offer of the Board of City Commissioners. The V.F.W. closed its office in New York and moved to Kansas City, KS. As the Memorial Building was still a long way from completion, they secured temporary quarters at 616 North 7th Street.

The cornerstone of the Memorial Building was not formally laid until May 26, 1924. Among the honored guests were John R. Quinn, Commander in Chief of the American Legion. It is not known if the strong interest of both the Legion and the V.F.W. in the building was to play any part in the events which followed.

Construction dragged on into 1925. As soon as space in the building was available, the V.F.W. moved into it. The Board of Trustees had signed a long term lease with the V.F.W. at a nominal rental figure of \$1.00 per year. Harry Darby had opposed this, and on June 5, 1925, he filed suit against his two fellow trustees. The suit alleged that prior to the completion of the building the City Commissioners unlawfully and wrongfully entered into a conspiracy and agreement with the V.F.W. to provide necessary rooms and accommodations for the national headquarters of the organization at the expense of the taxpayers, and that the trustees were about to carry out that agreement and permit the V.F.W. the use of the necessary space in the building for 20 years at \$1.00 per year. A further allegation was that a reasonable rental would have been \$25,000.

Three days after the suit was filed, the Memorial Building was formally accepted by the City. The total cost of the project was \$542,476.01 including the land acquisition. Even with the modification of the building plans this was a cost overrun of nearly nine percent, but this may have been the inevitable result of the boom economy of the 1920s.

When Darby vs Otterman was heard in Wyandotte County District Court, Judge Fischer held that the conduct of the defendants in furnishing light, water, fuel, and janitor service to the V.F.W. without compensation, together with the occupancy of the building, amounted to taxation for private and not public purposes and was unlawful and should be enjoined. An appeal was taken to the Kansas Supreme Court, which held that a city has

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no power to lease to a private corporation any part of a building erected under the provisions of the statute under which the Memorial Building was built. This decision was handed down in February, 1927. The Veterans of Foreign Wars then moved their headquarters across the line to Kansas City, MO, where it has remained ever since.

The Memorial Building has continued to serve a wide variety of civic functions for many years. In the early 1970s the City Commissioners abolished the Board of Trustees and the Finance Commissioner took over direct control of the building. Rock concerts and beer sales put the finances of the building back into the black, but neighboring property owners and various veterans' groups felt uncomfortable with the situation. The present building management is nevertheless highly aware of the building's historic and architectural significance. On August 2, 1983, the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Building was designated a Kansas City, KS Historic Landmark. This designation covers not only the exterior of the building but five interior spaces as well: Memorial Hall and its adjoining gallery, the north ground floor Meeting Room, the south ground floor Meeting Room, the Room of Silence, and the Chapel. To date this is the only structure listed under the Kansas City, KS Landmarks Ordinance which includes an interior designation.

THIS STATEMENT REFLECTS CURRENT KNOWLEDGE AND IS SUBJECT TO AMENDMENT.



## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Grant W. Harrington, Historic Spots or Mile-Stones in the progress of Wyandotte County, KS.

Merriam: The Mission Press, 1935.

City records, including original architectural plans.

This nomination was prepared from a draft submitted by Larry K. Hancks, City Planning Division,  
Municipal Ofc. Bldg., 701 N. 7th St.,  
Kansas City, KS 66101

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 2.15 acres

Quadrangle name Shawnee, KS

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A 

1	5	3	5	9	3	0	0	4	3	3	0	2	7	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C 

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D 

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E 

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F 

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G 

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H 

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Verbal boundary description and justification

Lot 1 to Lot 13, and Lot 36 to Lot 48, Block 159, Wyandotte City, and addition in Kansas City, Wyandotte County, KS.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
-------	------	--------	------

state	code	county	code
-------	------	--------	------

## 11. Form Prepared By

name title Richard J. Cawthon, Architectural Historian

organization Kansas State Historical Society

date June 24, 1985

street & number 120 W. 10th

telephone (913) 296-3251

city or town Topeka

state Kansas 66612

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

☐ national ☐ state ☒ local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

Executive Director

title Kansas State Historical Society

date 7-3-85

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

7062 11 NE  
(NORTH KANSAS CITY)

